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DANIEL DEFOE'S ROBINSON CRUSOE (THE MOVIE): A CROSS-CULTURAL ANALYSIS

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Abstrak. Film Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe adalah salah satu usaha untuk memberikan gambaran positif tentang kaum kulit berwarna. Stereotype yang ada selama ini tentang mereka berusaha untuk digantikan dengan suatu gambaran bahwa mereka juga memiliki sisi kemanusiaan dan kebaikan. Permasalahan yang kemudian menyertai representasi baru ini adalah adanya kemungkinan munculnya stereotype lain yang berdasarkan generalisasi. Ras adalah konstruksi budaya dan kenyataan tidak dapat dibandingkan dengan representasi karena tidak ada ceritera yang dapat menilai akurasi dari representasi suatu ras. Film ini tidak sepenuhnya sama dengan teks aslinya dikarenakan pertimbangan pasar. Namun demikian, film ini mampu memberikan contoh bagaimana menyikapi perbedaan dalam aspek-aspek kehidupan.

Kata Kunci: film, ceritera, kulit berwarna, representasi

A. INTRODUCTION

The media representation of people of color increased during the 1980s and 1990s in America. The attention, then, was focused on the kinds of representations which comprised of ethnicity and race. Black people in the West, for example, had been frequently been represented by news media as a series of problems, objects and victims (Gilroy, 1987). They were frequently described as criminals, unintelligent or ignorant. This is a kind of stereotyping that involves the attribution of negative traits to persons who are different from one's self. Stereotypes concern those excluded from the 'normal' order of things and simultaneously establish who is 'us' and who is 'them'. Quoting Hall (1997), Barker (2000: 208) mentions that 'stereotyping reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes difference'.

However, changes have occurred and there have been attempts to construct representations of Britain and America as multicultural societies. Such attempts, that are shown by the production of soap opera, comedies and movies that center on black family life and portray a wider cross-section of ethnic communities, are meant to seek more positive representations of people of color and other abjected groups. The demand for positive image of people of color means to show that these people are as 'good' or as 'human' as white people.

This paper observes this kind of representation in a movie entitled Daniel Defoe's Robinson

Crusoe. This movie is one of the versions of the novel written by Daniel Defoe. This is his most famous novel which was published in 1719 with the full title, *The Life and strange and surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*. This novel is often considered to be the first English novel. The story has remained popular ever since its publication. Almost every English speaking person has heard or read Daniel Defoe's famous novel "Robinson Crusoe." It has been translated into many languages. In the movie, Pierce Brosnan plays as Robinson Crusoe and William Takaku plays as Friday.

The story tells about a British seaman, the sole survivor of a shipwreck, who finds himself stranded on a remote island. Battling both nature and extreme isolation, Crusoe fights to save himself from slipping into madness. When Crusoe rescues Friday, a native islander, from a tribe of cannibals, the seaman's fate dramatically changes. Crusoe's desperate need for companionship forces him to confront a deeply rooted prejudice and enables the man to create a bond of friendship deeper than any he has known.

B. DISCUSSION

1. Cultural Analysis on Daniel Defoe's Robinson Crusoe (The Movie)

It is, however, important as regards this observation that one human being can be a complete enigma to another. We learn this when we come into a strange country with entirely

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strange traditions; and, what is more, even given a mastery of the country's language. We do not understand the people. (And not because of not knowing what they are saying to themselves.) We cannot find our feet with them. (Geertz 1973)

Wittgenstein, as quoted by Geertz above, made a point there. This is depicted in the various conflicts between Crusoe and Friday in the movie. Friday's action of taking out the heart of his enemy and about to eat it and his conception of 'Pakia' shocked Crusoe and made him outrageous. Friday was as confused as Crusoe when he learned about the 'master's' God. Conflicts appeared after two different cultures were confronted. Below is an attempt to interpret both men actions in order to get a better understanding of these two characters.

a. Robinson Crusoe, a Product of His 'Age'

A familiar notion of his 'age' was God, religion i.e. Christianity. In Western Europe, 18th Century is the dawn of nationalism as well as the dusk of religious modes of thought: Rationalist secularism brought a real fear of death. God is the only truth and everything should conform the rules of God, aspects of life at that time were to be judged by their religious values. Conflicts that Crusoe faced in his relationship with Friday were mainly because of this reason. It is therefore necessary to account for the notion of religion here. Every religion has a set of components which become a basis of individual perceptions of the world and his/her action. Actions are very much influenced by certain beliefs.

Within the Christian tradition, belief is understood to be a highly subjective experience, centering on the individual. From the Christian perspective, beliefs are not philosophical abstractions but are instrumental in decision-making, interpreting events, and planning for future activities (Levinson, et.al. 1996). Religious belief is based on faith and it is thought to be based on revelation rather than personal experience.

These central ideas are symbolized through symbols such as wine, bread, the holy crosses, the gesture of making this cross sign in prayers, religious pilgrimage - and that, as mentioned by Geertz, "such religious symbols, dramatized in

that he will "protect it against the savage."

When Crusoe rescues Friday, a native islander of an island near New Guinea, from a tribe of cannibals, he found a companion with this man. He wanted to be called 'master' since he 'owned' the island, since he was a white-man who saved the man with his gun, who gave him shelter, food and a name: 'Friday'. He was taught to speak English so the two could communicate easily. Being a Christian and having spent a long time alone in the island, Crusoe had very much time to read his bible.

The first time he saw Friday who cut out his enemy's chest and about to eat his heart he was angry and prevented him to do so. As Crusoe did not think that Friday had a religion, Crusoe then wanted to teach his to Friday so that God would guide him and prevented him from evil deeds.

b. Friday's Religious Beliefs

However, Crusoe's conception of God was very different from Friday's. In fact, Friday did have a God that he called Pakia. His God is concrete, it is in the form of crocodile. God's power is real, it can be seen, it can be touched. He didn't have a bible but he wore a necklace made of crocodile teeth to protect him and give him strength. He prayed, too. Friday's religious symbols were natural. It is this conception which develops his knowledge about and attitudes toward life. He saw that fish swim well, so he ate fish in order to swim well. He saw that a lizard climbed well, so he ate one in order to be like it. He believed that heart gave men power, so he ate heart to be powerful.

Therefore, it was hard for Friday to understand Crusoe's God, as He cannot be seen anywhere, not even in the bible. He could not understand why a good dog's soul could not go to Crusoe's God heaven. It was this 'abstractness' that bewildered Friday. They fought as Crusoe tried to make Friday received his religion. It was Crusoe's desperate need for companionship that forced him to confront a deeply rooted prejudice and enabled the man to forge a bond of friendship deeper than any he has known.

Both Crusoe and Friday were separated from their own group, Crusoe had to escape from the punishment of a murder he undeliberately

committed. In this way, Crusoe can be called 'a slave' because:

To many Westerners, "selling people" is a sufficient indicator of slavery. Selling, however, is but one part of a process that began when the person lost social identity by being captured, kidnapped, deprived of status as punishment for a crime, sold by kin in times of famine, and so on - being subjected, in effect, to a "social death" (Patterson 1982).

Friday was given to the Nimas as a tribute (this also made him 'a slave'). In this island, together they built a *communitas*, doing their own ritual. They lived together, did their daily routine together and they fought against the Nimas to protect their island together. As said by Turner, "ritual makes possible a time and a place in which participants can be "liberated" from rigid social classifications and burdensome social duties. During this time they passed through a cultural realm that has none or few of the attributes of the past or coming state. It was a transitory period of transformation, which enables them to return to their way of living in dramatically new ways (Turner 1973). They crossed a threshold together, they left the island by a small boat to go back to their group. Crusoe was rescued, went back home as a new person: free from the punishment, got married with his girlfriend, and became wiser. He emerged as a symbol of man's ability to survive the ultimate tests of nature. As for Friday, his group considered him as a dead man since he was sent to an island of the dead people. He managed to return home but he was now a 'Tanuang' (dead man) to his people. He died tragically at the hand of Crusoe's rescuer.

2. A Manipulation of the Original Text

The adventures of Crusoe on his island, the main part of Defoe's novel, are based largely on the central incident in the life of an undisciplined Scotsman, Alexander Selkirk. Daniel Defoe borrowed Selkirk's real-life adventure to create his legendary Robinson Crusoe. Alexander Selkirk's adventure did not take place on a deserted island in the Caribbean Sea. His lonely house was the uninhabited Island of Juan Fernandez in the Chilean Sea far off in the Pacific Ocean.

a. Alexander Selkirk - The Original Text

Alexander Selkirk was born in the year 1676 in Largo, Scotland, the son of a fairly prosperous tanner and leather worker. Selkirk was an adventurer at heart, unsuited to shoemaking and village life, and in 1695 ran away to sea and by 1703 was the Master of the Galley. Later he joined the famed William Dampier on a sea expedition in the Pacific whose sole purpose was preying on Spanish merchant ships. In September of 1704, after a quarrel with his own Captain, Selkirk requested that he be put ashore on the uninhabited island of Juan Fernandez, four hundred miles west of Valparaiso, Chile. It was fortunate for Selkirk because his ship later sank and killed its crews. Selkirk remained there until February of 1709 when he was discovered by Captain Woodes Rogers in the sailing ship "Duke" whose pilot happened to be Dampier. Despite his long castaway, Selkirk was appointed Mate by Rogers and later given command of a captured prize ship. Selkirk did not return to England until 1711 where he met the essayist, Richard Steele, who wrote up his story in a publication, "The Englishman" (1713). Selkirk finally returned home to Scotland where he lived the life of a loner but later went to sea again. He died at sea in 1721 at the age of forty-five.

b. The Life and strange and surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe-The Novel

Daniel Defoe made use of Selkirk's adventure in his novel "Robinson Crusoe". The story starts with Crusoe background as a son of a merchant. His father wants him to study law to get a better future. Like Selkirk, Crusoe is an adventurer at heart, he desires to sail the sea. Therefore, he ran away to board on his friend's boat and then after several sailings, an experience as being a slave to a Moor, an owner of a plantation in Brazil, he ended up on a desert island in the manner of Selkirk. With only a few supplies from the ship he builds a house, a boat and a new life. If Selkirk was the only inhabitant of his island, Crusoe's island is not wholly uninhabited, though, and there is the exciting but ominous presence of cannibals who Crusoe occasionally encounters and saves a native from. The latter becomes his servant, Man Friday. Crusoe seeks to make Friday civilized with

everything from eating habits to religious teachings. He begins to teach about the Christian God. Friday does not understand why the Devil cannot be beaten if God is stronger. Crusoe makes him understand that all must be given the chance to repent and be pardoned. Explaining this makes Crusoe even more full of faith because he clears up his own ideas.

Written in the medieval era, where God is central. He is the truth, somehow the author wants to address the readers with this issue. How God's hand helped those who believed. Crusoe lived in the island for twenty seven years before he was rescued. These characters and specific events were not to be found in Selkirk's story. This adaptation is somehow not without reasons. The novel was written in 1719, with the spirit of the age, Defoe added the 'slavery', 'religion' and the exotic tribe as flavors to his story so that the 'complete' plot would be interesting to the readers and would attract more and more readers. Besides the economic reason, the 'slavery' was used here since the author somehow wanted to criticize such practice which was popular at that time. To some extent, by the means of this novel Defoe wanted to teach his religion and at the same time criticize the practice of Christianizing certain ethnic groups or those who 'have no religion'.

C. CONCLUSION

As an adaptation of Daniel Defoe's most famous novel which was published in 1719 with the full title, *The Life and strange and surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe*, there are some amount of revisions that has to happen to successfully translate a book to the screen. The storyline departs significantly from that of Defoe's novel, most prominently in the beginning and the ending of the story, for example:

1. In the novel, Crusoe left England because he had an argument with his father regarding his education. While in the movie, he left to avoid punishment after he incidentally killed his friend, Patrick.
2. The romance between Mary and him was depicted quite intensely in the movie which was absent in the novel.
3. There were various incidents which were funny (e.g. the way the first time Friday had a

gun in his hand) and typical of those 'action' movie (e.g. the fight against the Nimas, the fight between Crusoe and Friday in his village, the 'touching' scene where Crusoe was hit by a poisonous arrow and Friday saved him). Like most other movies, this one cannot remain faithful to its original text. Time and cost efficiency are among the factors which cause this.

In order to attract movie-goers, the text has to be manipulated so that it can entertain them. Then, the movie itself becomes a symbol of the material conditions of life at present, where the movie producers want to acquire maximum profits.

However, the screenplay manages to maintain a nice balance between modern ideas and 18th-century ones in the treatment of Crusoe's relationship with Friday. The audience get a glimpse of the worldview of the 18-century white man, who would automatically view himself as "master" and the "savage" Friday as slave/enemy, and the way that religion sets up conflicts where none need to exist. The film gives an example of how to deal with the differences, how to live in tolerance with someone who has different religion. It is optimistic about the ability of individual people to overcome their own

This movie shows an attempt to give a positive image of people of color (i.e. Friday). However, if this representation of positive image is taken for granted it may cause a problem. For example, the audience can fall to the assumption that all people like Friday have essential qualities in common whereas they may not. This may lead to another stereotyping. Race is a cultural construction and people cannot compare the real

with representations because no criteria can assess the accuracy of the representation of race. However, this does not mean that the audience should abandon that representation of the positive image on the people of color. It is wise to accept this positive image without making claims to universal truth.

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